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Capitalist and Co-operative Ideology in Small Town Industry: A Case Study of Desborough.

INTRODUCTION.



Desborough is a small market town situated in the Ise Valley in North Northamptonshire, halfway between Kettering to the South-east and Market Harborough, Leicestershire to the North-west. It is an ancient place.¹

Desborough was mentioned in Domesday Book and was valued at sixty-five shillings, in comparison Birmingham was valued at twelve shillings. Four miles to the South is Rothwell, its ancient name is Rowell. These two towns along with Kettering and Corby make up the industrial strength of North Northamptonshire.

This dissertation will look at the town of Desborough, and its hinterland, to examine how it developed through what is known as the Industrial Revolution. It will examine North Northamptonshire from the standpoint of the impact the Industrial Revolution had on the area and the social change that came about. The dissertation will make a sociological investigation, to understand what social and democratic changes were caused by the industrialisation of the area

¹ J. R. Moore, *The History of Desborough*. (Desborough: Published by Author for Private Circulation, 1910) Republished by Gerald Coe. (Ilkley: The Moxton Press Ltd., 1982) p. 1.

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particularly when the Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society was formed, and its co-operational approach to business. There are very few available records for this dissertation to interrogate; there is one book on the history of Desborough by J.R. Moore produced in 1910 which covers the period under examination. Moore's book mentioned the Desborough Co-operative Society just once, even though it had been in existence for fifty-seven years by then, saying: 'Mr T. B. Clarke-Thornhill who in 1899 sold [the Manor Farm Estate] to the Desborough Industrial Provident Co-operative Society, the present owners'.² However, the available material will be examined to give an accurate portrayal of industrial and social life in the town from the early 1800s through to 1914.

Chapter two will discuss various interpretations by some eminent historians on the Industrial Revolution and how those interpretations have altered with the passing years and further investigation and understanding. It will discover that Desborough was behind other areas with its industrial growth and will examine the reasons for this. It will compare Desborough with Birmingham where the Industrial Revolution started earlier and gained momentum faster. Whilst Birmingham accelerated along the road to Industrial strength, Desborough was a quiet back water relying on the agrarian way of life that it had known for hundreds of years, until the coming of the railway. It will discuss and challenge the long held belief that during the Industrial Revolution the rich got richer at the expense of the poor who got poorer. This was the case in Desborough for the

² Moore, p. 14.

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first sixty years of the Industrial Revolution. However, when the second part of the Industrial Revolution came along the poor fought back and took the town out of poverty and into greater relative prosperity.

In Chapter three (I) the dissertation will then look at the early years of industrialisation and the move from the agricultural way of life to a small and important industry using the fruits of the local farming community to produce woollen and linen fabrics. As agriculture began to mechanise, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, farm work became scarce and the emerging industries became vital to the well-being of the town and its environs. The wool, linen and weaving industries died out about 1840. The silk trade emerged and became a large employer in the area until its demise, mainly due to government tax regimes and fashion changes, in the 1860s.

Chapter three (II) will then conduct an investigation into the Desborough Co-operative Society. It will look at its humble beginnings and how the society became the largest employer and owner of land in the area. It will interrogate the society's records from 1894 through to 1914 to see how it recorded its phenomenal growth and expansion into all aspects of Desborough life and how it came to have the largest membership per capita of population of any co-operative society in Britain. It will also look at the history of the Society as told by the Society's *Jubilee Souvenir* handbook, which is one of the main sources of information on the society.

Boots and shoes and the railway were the main salvation of the town and in Chapter three (III) the dissertation will examine how this expanded and brought much needed investment and employment into the area. It will briefly look at the

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Riley family and their influence on industry from the silk trade to boots and shoes. Riley's *Jubilee Souvenir* book, in part, tells the story of the three generations of Rileys that invested in Desborough's industrial, political and religious life. The dissertation will continue with an investigation of other businesses in the area, including Joseph Cheaney and Sons and B.Toone and Co. Ltd.

Chapter three (IV) will discuss the influence of Harry Burditt and Symingtons in bringing corsetry to Desborough and how their presence in the town encouraged the Co-operative Wholesale Society (C.W.S.) to move its corset factory from Manchester to Desborough. It will also examine how Harry Burditt's son, Howard, set up what was to become the vastly successful international company, Rigid Containers.

The dissertation will then look, in Chapter three (V) at the iron ore and mineral deposits which fuelled the glass trade in Staffordshire and went to supply iron ore to the great steel towns of the country including Corby, some six miles from Desborough. Finally the dissertation will very briefly talk about the brick and tile industry.

An investigation into the increase in population and the growth of the town will be examined in Chapter four. This will be carried out through an interrogation of local directories of the time which give valuable insight to the increase in businesses in Desborough.

The dissertation will then be drawn together with a conclusion in the final Chapter five. That will show that Desborough did industrialise later than other parts of the country and remained agricultural for longer. It will show that

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industrialisation was led by the wool, linen and lace trades, then the silk trade.

The dissertation will be drawn together to show how one industry brought others into the town as shown with the corset and boot and shoe industries and how others such as box manufacture fed the requirements of other industries in the area. When the railway came to Desborough its fortunes changed. The improvements in living standards continued with the formation of the Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society Ltd., whose ideals of co-operation did upset the capitalist *status quo*. It will also prove that several of the ideals of co-operation were quietly forgotten for the sake of the expansion and success of the Desborough Co-operative Society.

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THE INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION



Old Handloom Weaver (figure 1).³

³ R.M. Sanders, Chris Marlow and Jesse Marlow, *Desborough Industrial & Provident Co-operative Society Ltd. Jubilee Souvenir: 1863-1913*. (Manchester: C.W.S. Printing Works, 1913), p. 17.

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‘Current interpretations of the British Industrial Revolution are dominated by the view that’⁴ ‘less happened, less dramatically than once thought’.⁵ Whether, and to what extent the time, from the late eighteenth to early nineteenth century was one of Industrial Revolution is dependent on two things: ‘how we specify ‘industrial revolution’ and how we attempt to measure it’.⁶ Opinions on this have changed over the past one hundred years or so. There have been radical shifts in the interpretation of the phenomenon. It is ‘the historian that creates continuities and discontinuities and establishes their timing’.⁷ One thing is for certain, the speed and the progress of the Industrial Revolution within Desborough and North Northamptonshire, from the research done for this dissertation, would not fall in with the dates suggested for the Industrial Revolution. Much less did happen and much later in the region than is generally acknowledged for some parts of Britain. Birmingham, only fifty miles from Desborough, industrialised and urbanised much earlier, the entrepreneurs of the Midlands, Bolton, Watt, Wedgwood, Cadbury and others embraced the new technologies. They had the capital to back them, and with the *laissez-faire* attitude of the 1760s, meant that anyone prepared to risk money and reputation stood a chance to make themselves wealthy and possibly famous.

This was not the case in North Northamptonshire. The first sixty years of the Industrial Revolution passed the region by. However, the agricultural revolution did not, although it was quite slow. In the late eighteenth-century farming was,

⁴ Pat Hudson, *The Industrial Revolution* (London: Hodder Arnold, 1992), p. 1.

⁵ D. Cannadine, ‘British History: Past, Present, & Future?’ *Past and Present* 116 (1987)(p. 183) cited in Hudson, p. 1.

⁶ Hudson, p. 1.

⁷ Hudson, p. 1.

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and remained, the most extensive employer of labour; 'the militia list of 1777 showed that fifty-one per cent'⁸ of the men worked on the land. The *Universal Directory* of 1791 showed no wholesale shoe-manufacturers were listed and Northampton was still a small pre-industrial town,⁹ the rest of the county was also pre-industrial. It should be understood that the attitude to the study of the Industrial Revolution has changed in recent years. This has helped with our understanding of the nature of the Industrial Revolution, how it affected different areas and peoples, why the population grew and why urbanisation occurred.

Hudson says on the this:

Quantitative estimates of output, productivity growth, real wages and the like, alongside the qualitative evidence available. The current methodological fashion in economic history and in much social history demands more statistics [...] rigour [...] proof, less speculation or even imagination.¹⁰

Hudson goes on to suggest that historians should be scientists as well as detectives or our understanding of the phenomena would be diminished.

Hobsbawm claimed, in 1962, that: 'it was then [the 1780s][...]that all the relevant statistical indices took a sudden sharp, almost vertical turn upwards which marks the take-off'.¹¹ Relatively contemporary approximations of macro-economic fluctuations have highlighted the rashness of this claim. It was certainly incorrect if applied to Desborough and North Northamptonshire. The area did not '*take-off*', in real terms, until the coming of the railway in 1857. The

⁸ *Northamptonshire Militia Lists 1777*, ed. By V.A. Hatley, (1973), cited in R.L. Greenall *The History of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough* (Chichester: Phillimore & Co. Ltd.' 2000) p. 92. (xviii, table 5).

⁹ Greenall, p.85.

¹⁰ Hudson, pp. 1-2.

¹¹ Eric, J. Hobsbawm, *The Age of Revolution 1789-1848* (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson Ltd., 1962), p. 28.

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economic growth, technical change and economic development of the period between 1760 and 1850 is the key for many academics to unlocking the Industrial Revolution's secrets.

For the defenders of classical liberal convention of free enterprise the Industrial Revolution is more important for insidious reasons. Writers and thinkers such as Dickens, Marx and Engels have linked the terms Industrial Revolution and capitalism and made them synonymous with the degradation of the poor and working class. These pessimistic interpretations of the Industrial Revolution have led to the popular acceptance of what R.M. Hartwell calls the 'theory of immiseration'—a belief that unrestrained capitalism was making the rich richer and the poor poorer during the Industrial Revolution'.¹² This interpretation suggests that the injustices and horrors of the Industrial Revolution, child labour, and a poor, repressed, underpaid, overworked working class prove to be those of capitalism. Almost all history text books show that most academics, who do not study the Industrial Revolution specifically, accept that; '*dark, satanic mills*', capitalism led to the deterioration of living conditions for the working class, scenario. This view is amply shown in the following piece from Norton Anthology:

For the great majority of the laboring class the results of the policy [of *laissez faire*] were inadequate wages, long hours of work under sordid conditions, and the large-scale employment of women and children for tasks which destroy body and soul. Reports from investigating committees on coal mines found male and female children

¹² Cited in John Majewski, 'The Industrial Revolution Working Class Poverty or Prosperity,' *The Freeman Ideas on Liberty*, (July 1986) 36, 7. <<http://www.thefreemanonline.org/columns/the-industrial-revolution-working-class-poverty-or-prosperity/>> (Vol.18 No-4. Fall). [accessed 21 September 2011] (para.1 of 27)

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ten or even five years of age harnessed to heavy coal-sledges which they dragged crawling on their hands and knees.¹³

‘This harsh interpretation of life during the Industrial Revolution has directly affected public policy and has made the Industrial Revolution a battle cry for the detractors of capitalism’.¹⁴ These interpretations may be popular, but are unfounded. The quantitative (material) standards of living were improving as real incomes rose. The fall in the mortality rate indicates that qualitative (sociological) standards also rose. This was found to be the case in Desborough and the surrounding district. By the 1860s, whilst still poor, things were improving; this is demonstrated by the fact that working men started to invest in ventures such as co-operative societies. No one knew if the investments of one pound in the Desborough Co-operative Society, with one small shop only open for a few hours one evening a week, would succeed or not. However, some were prepared, even with very little money, as we will see later in the paper, to invest in this enterprise. Those more recent economic historians who study the Industrial Revolution now believe that there was at least a slight increase in wages and living standards. This has led Williamson to state:

Unless new errors are discovered, the debate over real wages in the early nineteenth century is over: the average worker was much better off in any decade from the 1830s on than any decade before 1820.¹⁵

¹³ Douglass North, *Structure and Change in Economic History*, (New York: Norton, 1981). *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*. 8 Vols, (London: W.W. Norton and Co., 1962-2006), II. 3.

¹⁴ Majewski (para. 4 of 27).

¹⁵ Cited in Majewski, (Para. 6 of 27).

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The Nobel Laureate F.A. Hayek says, regarding the pessimism of the anti-capitalist view of the Industrial Revolution: 'one supreme myth which more than any other has served to discredit the economic system to which we owe our modern day civilisation'.¹⁶ During the time of the Industrial Revolution things improved, as happened in Desborough in the later years of the phenomenon. Politicians realised that they needed to restrict and limit child labour. Some factory owners resisted, arguing that by children working they received money to buy food thereby not starving, others just wanted cheap labour. In 1833 and 1844 the Factory Acts were passed in England: children younger than nine were not allowed to work, children were not permitted to work at night and the maximum hours an under eighteen could work was limited to twelve hours per day. The law was supposed to be enforced by factory inspectors but their scarcity made enforcement almost impossible. Some ten years later, the employment of women and children working in mines was forbidden. Some say that the loss of income to families from women and children not working caused great hardship, but from a social point of view it was an improvement because of the drop in the mortality rate. This also gave the Victorian middle-class an excuse to go amongst the poor, women in particular, and espouse the moral virtues of women looking after the children and the working man in the family. This led to the early founding of social work as pioneered and practiced by the women of the Cadbury family in Birmingham.

¹⁶ Cited in Majewski, (Para. 4 of 27).

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Old Toll-Bar stood next to the 'cross' on the George Public House Corner (figure. 2).¹⁷

¹⁷ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. Frontispiece.

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THE INDUSTRIALISATION OF DESBOROUGH.

During all the changes and the upheavals of the Middle Ages Desborough made little or no industrial progress. Generation after generation ploughed and sowed, gathered in the harvest, and tended cattle.¹⁸

Industrialisation did eventually come to Desborough, however, it was far later than it was for many other parts of Britain. The mill towns of the North and commercial cities such as Birmingham and Manchester were far more advanced and far more industrialised than North Northamptonshire.

Desborough does not have a navigable river; the Grand Union Canal is some fifteen miles away. It did, however, have a main highway that was to be designated the A6 which ran from London to Carlisle, giving a main arterial route to the industrial mills of Lancashire. This road also had its pitfalls as it was the businessmen from just up and down the A6 who were to take advantage of the town's workforce, and came and went as they pleased. 'The railway did not come to Desborough until May 1857'.¹⁹ As previously stated, Desborough and Northamptonshire, industrialised later compared with other parts of Great Britain.

At the time the Industrial Revolution was getting under way on the coalfields, Northamptonshire men were still employed chiefly on the land whilst some were weavers, and rather fewer made shoes.²⁰

Desborough remained small and agricultural; what industry existed was based on the produce of that agriculture. As agriculture became more mechanised

¹⁸ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 15

¹⁹ Moore, p. 42.

²⁰ Greenall, p. 93.

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less workers were needed and the resultant unemployment was taken up by the emerging wool and linen trades. These trades were carried out in people's houses and the raw material was grown locally J.R. Moore Says:

Desborough [...] soon began to specialise, and the spinning and the weaving of woollen and linen fabrics was carried on to a considerable extent here in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.²¹

Moore goes on to say:

Wad or woad for dyeing the wool blue, was grown rather extensively during the eighteenth century in the eastern part of the parish [...] Flax for linen was also grown in the parish, and spun into jersey and woven.²²

Most of the wool produced was sent to the great wool weaving districts of Lancashire and the North, 'with some being retained for the local manufacture of serges, tammies and shaloon'.²³ Desborough saw the rise and fall of the woollen, weaving and linen industries, which died out in about 1840, and the looms removed to Banbury, Oxfordshire.

Some twenty years before the demise of the wool and linen trade home based silk and lace trades were introduced from Coventry, London and other places and carried out in the employee's homes. The lace trade made pillow lace then embroidered nets, ladies' net veils or falls,²⁴ employing large numbers of women, girls and boys. The first factory to be opened in Desborough was a silk factory in Paddock Lane, three cottages knocked into one, under the ownership of Benjamin Riley II who was probably the first entrepreneur in

²¹ Moore, p. 88.

²² Moore, p. 88.

²³ Moore, p. 88.

²⁴ Moore, p. 89.

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Desborough and he and his heirs certainly were the pioneers of industrialisation in the town. The date given on a draft lease, granted for twenty-one years on the property, was 1832 which was quite late in the Industrial Revolution era for a first factory, and a small factory at that. 'Subsequently several large factories were erected for the warping and winding of the silk and also weaving'.²⁵

According to the Riley account books by 1832 the silk trade was firmly established in Desborough with 'large stocks of silk, cotton and velvet (shag) with looms and winding machines at Desborough, Rothwell and Kettering',²⁶ which gave employment to many hundreds of people.

Wool weaving and linen trades introduced the '*truck system*' which was a scheme where workers were paid in vouchers or tokens exchangeable only in company shops. 'This was sometimes considered useful when an area was lacking in retail outlets'.²⁷ The system was also known as the '*Tommy shop*' and by the 1830s became regarded as a serious element of total control practised by employers. The '*truck*' was made illegal in 1831 after the Merthyr Rising, an example of workers rebelling against working conditions, amongst other things. However, the system continued until the 1860s in Desborough, with many sinking further and deeper into debt.

Lace-making was introduced through the agencies and representatives of manufacturing firms from Leicester and Northampton. These agents amassed fortunes by means of an unhealthy, slavish system known as the truck system. The agents took advantage of their positions as

²⁵ Moore, p. 88.

²⁶ Belinda Humfrey, from information displayed at Desborough Heritage Centre archive.

²⁷ 'Truck System, The.' *The Welsh Academy Encyclopedia of Wales*. (Cardiff: Academi, 2008) [Credo Reference online] <http://www.credoreference.com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/entry/waencywales/truck_system_the> [accessed 9 January 2011].

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agents. They gave out work to the weavers and lace-makers on the understanding that the money thus earned should be spent at their own particular shops, for the agent was usually a small private trader, such as a grocer and general dealer. This method led to serious abuses.²⁸

If Desborians got work it would often depend on whether they shopped with the agent or manager and if they owed him money. These conditions did not only affect men but also women and children. This led the men of Desborough, sick of the long hours and poor pay and the tyranny of the land owners, agents and representatives, to consider an alternative and adopt the Co-operative way of life. Benjamin Riley seems to have been appalled at the agents' behaviour and assisted the town's co-operators to set themselves up in competition with the agents.



Jesse Marlow General Manager and Secretary of Desborough Co-operative Society 1886-1913.
(figure 3).²⁹

²⁸ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 28.

²⁹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 69. (figure 3)

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Co-operation.

Life in Desborough changed dramatically in 1863 when the Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society was established, it brought profound social and economic changes, and further enhanced industrialisation in the area. The Society was formed in the mould of the Rochdale Society.

The Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers, founded on 21st December 1844, was an early consumer Co-operative, and the first to pay a patronage dividend, forming the basis for the modern Co-operative movement.³⁰

The Co-operative movement is frequently referred to and identified with retailing, and its foundations ascribed to the philosophy of the Rochdale Pioneers who set up the first store to pay dividends to members, based on how much each member spent with the society. There were seven principles:

Open membership, democratic control (one person, one vote), distribution of surplus in proportion to trade, payment of limited interest on capital, political and religious neutrality, cash trading, promotion of education.³¹

Rochdale Pioneers, William Cooper, Charles Howarth and twenty-six others opened their first shop in Toad Lane, Rochdale. Members served in the shop which only opened two evenings a week. 'The principle on which they acted was that the profits should be redistributed to the purchasers by means of a dividend'.³² These were self-help groups of mutual co-operation along with

³⁰ John K. Walton "Co-operative movement" *The Oxford Companion to British History*. Ed. John Cannon. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009). *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press. (para. 1 of 1). <<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t110.e1117>> [accessed 30 December 2010].

³¹ Special Committee, *The Present Application of the Rochdale Principles of Co-operation (1937)*, International Co-operative Alliance, p. 2. (para. 8 of 8) [accessed 10 December 2011].

³² J.A. Cannon "Rochdale Pioneers" *The Oxford Companion to British History*, Ed John Cannon. Oxford

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friendly societies and trade unions. They are generally thought of as reformers with socialist tendencies and were not Marxist by nature. They were, along with parliamentary enfranchisement, part of the reformist British tradition. In the case of the Desborough Society it was not only involved in retailing but expanded into an industrial force that pushed the area firmly into the second part of the Industrial Revolution, creating employment and adding to the social and political life of Desborough.

Co-operatives were not always accepted by the capitalist elite, although there were a few capitalists who thought along socially just lines. One such visionary was factory owner and social thinker Robert Owen (1771-1858). He was a cotton magnate and idealistic socialist, he is often described as the '*Father of Socialism*'.³³ He gained a reputation as a successful and humanitarian businessman. He published *A New View of Society* (1814-1818) where he espoused that: 'character was formed by environment, and a system of villages of co-operation rather than large unplanned towns was propitious to social progress'.³⁴ The Rochdale Pioneers' system of paying a dividend to members appealed to Co-operators who sought to save as they spent. This also brought the movement into alignment with prevailing social values. Other Co-operatives took up the Rochdale philosophy and the movement spread

University Press, 2009. *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press, (para 1 of 1).
<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t110.e3641>> [accessed 30 December 2010].

³³ John Butt "Owen, Robert" *The Oxford Companion to British History*, Ed John Cannon. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009) *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press, (para.1 of 1).

<<http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t110.e3229>> [accessed 30 December 2010].

³⁴ Butt. (para 1 of 1).

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rapidly, supplying unadulterated foodstuffs at accessible prices and making a virtue of refusing credit and each member would receive a dividend, known by many as the '*divi*' as a percentage of the amount they spent on co-operative goods and, later, services. This was usually expressed as being so many pence in the pound, such as '1s. 6d to the pound'.³⁵ This '*divi*' was saved by the member and could be withdrawn in cash or spent in the shop. The movement was founded on egalitarian principles, but only for its members. The minutes of the Desborough Society show that new members had to be agreed by the board who held the right of veto.

An earlier alternative society based movement rapidly grew during the 1820s and 1830s, in which mutual assistance instead of competitive individualism was the order of the day. A 'New Moral World'³⁶ whose superiority, once established throughout the working of communities in which labour was the unit of currency, would drive out the irrationality of capitalism. The first Co-operators opened shops selling the surpluses from manufacturing and farming as a way to build community cohesion. However, most of the early Co-operatives failed.

Desborough followed the example of Rochdale, as it was their very ideals that inspired the Co-operators of the town to form its own Society. 'Co-operation was especially popular in the textile towns of Lancashire and West Yorkshire in the mid-Victorian period',³⁷ which later spread to Scotland, the Midlands and the South. Co-operative Societies such as Desborough's were locally based and

³⁵ Coalfield Web Materials, <<http://www.agor.org.uk/cwm/themes/co-op/commerce.asp>> [accessed 12 November 2011] (para. 3 of 10).

³⁶ Walton. (para 1 of 1)

³⁷ Walton. (para 1 of 1)

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managed. However, the Co-operative Wholesale Society was formed in the same year as the Desborough Co-operative Society, 1863, to co-ordinate the purchasing and, later, manufacturing for the movement as a whole. Most members came to see the dividend as the most important aspect of co-operation. The movement had socialist idealism principles, providing classes and libraries, supporting strikes, and offering political confidence and empowerment to working-class women through its Women's Guild.

Desborough's experience was very similar as they ran these groups and supported the working people. From engaging with their records they appear to have supported many of the movements goals, however, do not seem very tolerant toward any perceived wrong doing toward themselves.

George Jacob Holyoake said:

Co-operation, in the industrial sense of the word, means equitable division of profits with worker, capitalist, and consumer, concerned in the undertaking.³⁸

He describes a Co-operative thus:

The new Co-operation [...] begins in mutual help, with a view to end in a common competence. A Co-operative society commences with persuasion, proceeds by consent, seeks success by common effort, incurs risks, and shares losses, intending that all its members shall proportionally share whatever benefits are secured. The equality sought is not a mad equality of 'equal division of unequal earnings',³⁹ but an equitable award of gains proportionate to work done.⁴⁰

³⁸ George Jacob Holyoake *The History of Co-operation*, (London, T. Fisher Unwin 1908) p.4.

³⁹ Ebenezer Elliott (1781-1849) 'What is Communism'. A Poem. Elliott was born in Rotherham and was called the 'Corn Law Rhymer' and 'Poet of the Poor'. He ran an Iron and Steel business in Sheffield, he was an extreme Calvinist a strong Radical and a Chartist. in Holyoake p.4.

⁴⁰ Holyoake, p.4.

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Holyoake's comments suggest the movement was a collaboration between capitalist, worker and consumer working together for a common good.

The Desborough *Jubilee Souvenir* says:

Coloured plush waistcoats were very fashionable at one time, but fashions change, and this did, and 500 plush weavers are said to have been thrown out of employment in Desborough. The ordinary handloom weaving was effectually killed by the invention of the power-loom. Manufacturers in the North of England, by adopting the new methods of weaving, soon captured all the trade from the handloom weavers in the villages. William Burditt appears to have been the last weaver to carry on his trade in Desborough. He worked his loom in a now extinct house near 37, Gold Street (see figure 1).⁴¹

The wealth that was created in Desborough was not retained in the town; entrepreneurs who were from Northampton, Leicester, Coventry and other more industrialised areas took the money with them. They came into the area and exploited the workers who, in the early part of the Industrial Revolution, worked mainly in their homes. When times got hard, some of these entrepreneurs and their agents just moved back out of the town and continued their business in the places from whence they came. It would appear, from the extract above, they left the carnage of the unemployed poor to their own devices. It was for this very reason that the forward thinkers of Desborough established the Desborough Society with encouragement from Benjamin Riley who was the main industrialist in the town. Benjamin Riley seems to have been the exception to other industrialists as he reinvested in the town. The Society was started by twenty-eight men, the same number that started the Rochdale Society, who each

⁴¹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 15.

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invested one pound in the society, with at least one of them having to borrow the money from the very people the society was set up to oppose. It was, of course, not known by the lender what the loan was for.

So in the year 1863 meetings were held by the weavers in Mr. Riley's room, and ultimately, at the final meeting in the large room at the Talbot Hotel, 28 members were enrolled, £28 capital subscribed, and a Committee formed.⁴²

One of the early members of the Society is said to have owed money to the 'trucker' saying he was 'fettered in this way by strap'⁴³ and that he longed to be free of the debt and join the Desborough Society, but he could not as he had a spouse and eight children and was in debt to the 'white-haired beneficent grocer's'.⁴⁴ A farm labourer friend of his, John Ginns, withdrew his accumulated dividend from the Society and lent the money to clear the debt: 'to pay off scores and become a free man, helping himself and helping others in the practical scheme of trading as the Society had now set up'.⁴⁵ As previously stated the society was founded in 1863 by men of the town who were looking for a more socially acceptable way to live. The Truck system, although illegal for many years, was still in operation and the inhabitants of Desborough were desperate to be free of the indebtedness this brought with it.

In the 1850s Co-operation had started to take hold in the Midlands. With missionary zeal the message of Co-operation was spread from Leicester and Market Harborough. John Jarman from Clipstone (the village's old spelling), a

⁴² Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 33.

⁴³ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 33.

⁴⁴ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 33.

⁴⁵ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 33.

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remote North Northamptonshire village on the borders with Leicestershire, was the main exponent of Co-operation to the townsfolk. Jarman was related to Thomas Jarman the famous composer of sacred music, who also lived in the village. Both were ardent religious nonconformists. John would hold meetings at the old cross (see figure 2), which was not a cross at all but a gatepost from Harrington Hall. When the hall was demolished one of the gateposts with a large stone ball on the top was moved to Desborough's High Street. It has associations with the English Civil War; men gathered there to find employment in agriculture and weaving and Jarman addressed the townsfolk and extolled the virtues of the Co-operative way.

But a few men were beginning to think. The work of the Co-operative missionaries began to show some result. Meetings were held at the Cross, and the ethics of Co-operation pointed the way to a system free from the thralldom of debt. Following out the fundamental idea of Co-operation, a few of the thinking men soon perceived that it would be greatly to their benefit to concentrate their purchasing power and to take collective action for the supply of the necessaries of life.⁴⁶

The Co-operative *Jubilee Souvenir* goes on to say;

The silk plush and velvet weavers at that time in Desborough were a very clean, healthy, and intelligent class of artisans. It was amongst these men that the first seeds of collective effort were sown, and the sapling which was eventually to develop into such sturdy growth, and bear such wonderful fruit, first took root.⁴⁷

This all happened much to the dismay and disapproval of the '*trucksters*'.

Nevertheless Co-operation prevailed which, over one hundred and fifty years, saw the Desborough Co-operative Society become the largest employer, land

⁴⁶ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 28.

⁴⁷ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, pp. 27-28.

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owner and industrialists in the area as well as the society with the largest membership per capita of population in the country.



The Original Shop in High Street (figure 4).⁴⁸

From its humble beginnings with a single shop (see figure 4) that opened one evening per week in the High Street, part of the old town, by 1913 the Desborough Co-operative Society owned:

Amongst the commercial concerns flourishing here, perhaps it will not be thought too presumptuous if first mention is made of the Co-operative Society. So many and varied are its agencies that we give a list of its Land and Houses, Savings Bank, different departments: Grocery, Drapery, Clothing, Boots, Millinery, Hardware, Furniture, Confectionery, Bakery, Butchery, Farming and Grazing, Dairy, Brick and Tile Making, Iron-ore Quarrying, and Coal Distributive Department. There is also a Co-partnership Boot Manufacturing Society known as the "Crompton Boot Manufacturers Limited," and the Co-operative Wholesale Society have their Corset Factory established here. Private enterprise is represented by the boot and shoe industry and iron-ore mining.⁴⁹

The setting up of the Co-operative freed the people of Desborough from debt and allowed them to change their employer without fear of hardship or

⁴⁸ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 29.

⁴⁹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 19.

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starvation. Desborough Co-operative Society was a leader in many areas

including land reform. An article in *The Times* of Monday 31 July 1905 stated:

It was reported that on Thursday 27th July 1905 a meeting was held by the Committee on Small Holdings, which is a departmental committee appointed by the President of the Board of Agriculture and Fisheries, to enquire into the subject of Small Holdings, The following members were present: - Lord Onslow [...] evidence was given by Mr Jesse Marlow, secretary of the Desborough Co-operative Society.⁵⁰

Evidently at the time the question of allotments and small holdings were very important and it was considered that Desborough Co-operative Society were at the forefront of that movement:

Perhaps the most apparent sign of the prosperity of this town [Desborough] is the "well-to-do " appearance of the working-class section of the population, and the considerable stake they have in the district as landowners. Nearly every male adult possesses an allotment or small holding, having bought and paid for them through the Co-operative Society's land purchase scheme, a scheme by means of which the working men of Desborough have been able to acquire a position the like of which few similar communities have excelled.⁵¹

The Co-operative *Jubilee Souvenir* goes on to mention the Committee on Small Holdings:

In 1906, owing to the recognised importance of the Society's enterprise in land developments, he [Jesse Marlow] was honoured by being called upon to give evidence before the Commission appointed by the Board of Agriculture in an inquiry upon the subject of smallholdings in Great Britain.⁵²

There is a difference in the years stated in *The Times* and the *Jubilee Souvenir*.

It has not been possible to discover if *Jubilee Souvenir* was incorrect or Marlow

⁵⁰ 'Committee on Small Holdings', *The Times*, 31 July 1905; p, 13.

<http://infotrac.galegroup.com.libezproxy.open.ac.ukitw/infomark/261/894/100865769w16purl=rc2_TTDA_2_Desborough+Co-operative+Society> [accessed 20 February 2010].

⁵¹ Saunders, Marlow and Marlow, p 19.

⁵² Saunders, Marlow and Marlow, p 72.

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was called before the committee again in 1906 although an extract from the minutes of the society dated May 1905 suggest that the date in *The Times* is the correct one.

In consequence of the recognised importance of the report & evidence to be tendered to the Small Holdings Committee the secretary was granted permission to ask for Geo. O. Nicholson of Mkt. Harborough, to draft up same in proper manner.⁵³



Rushton Road Cottages, built by Desborough Co-operative Society (figure 5).⁵⁴

The Society was widely known, the *New York Times* said in 1913:

Sometimes a small community is dominated by these co-operative enterprises. Such is Desborough, with several prosperous co-operative shops and a large co-operative store which has put a good deal of money into shops and besides owns considerable land upon which it has built cottages for the workmen.⁵⁵

The Society had indeed built cottages (see figure 5 & 6) which it sold as well as land through their land purchase scheme, this enabled the townsfolk to enjoy the ownership of property and be able to repay the capital along with a small interest charge over a period of years. This seems to go against the principle of no credit of which the original Co-operative movement made such a virtue. It

⁵³ Northamptonshire Record Office, (NRO) DCS 2 'The Minute Book of the General Committee of the Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society', 19 May 1905.

⁵⁴ Saunders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Samuel P. Orth, 'British Co-operative Manufacturing Grows Slowly', the *New York Times* 26 October 1913, Magazine section, p. SM12.

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would appear that, certainly in the case of the Desborough Society, some of the old ideals of co-operation were being adjusted in the pursuit of a successful and profitable society.



Federation Avenue Cottages (figure 6)⁵⁶

Evidence of the relaxation of some of the co-operators values is shown

because, according to the Society's own records, in the late 1890s and the early 1900s the Desborough Society embarked on an ambitious expansion, buying land which included manorial rights, other institutions, and buildings. They built themselves new shops including a haberdashery and a meeting hall (see figure 7), they purchased an entire village and its land, several farms, built the corset factory, as well as a shoe factory, and in 1885 opened the Penny Bank. These acquisitions and expansions were made to strengthen the Society for the benefit of the members whose numbers were increasing exponentially because of the Society's success, however, they borrowed many thousands of pounds for these endeavours.

⁵⁶ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 60.

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Haberdashery Department and Meeting Rooms (figure 7).⁵⁷

These purchases are outlined in the many minute books, maps and other documents that are held at the Northamptonshire Record Office (NRO). The NRO has the Co-operative's records from 1894 through to 1952. The whereabouts of the society records prior to this date are unknown, however there is a rumour that they may be stored in the meeting rooms, which are now closed and boarded up. A search of the records that are available for the period 1894 to 1914 has revealed many interesting insights into the working of the board of directors and the quest to increase the size and profitability of the Society as well as the mundane day to day running of the Society. The general board of the Society met once a week and discussions on such things as the closing of parts of the Society's businesses for Whitsun or the size of an increase in an employee's wages or mundane issues such as smears on

⁵⁷ Saunders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 42

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windows would be discussed. Examples of the resolutions discussed on 19 May 1905, are:

Resolved to call Langmans attention to smears on windows [...]
The Fire Brigade was allowed to hold a wet drill at Rails field [...]
Resolved to arrange to close places of business during the Whitsuntide & Rothwell Fair Holidays as follows No 1, 2 store & Bakery close at 1pm Whit Monday and also at 1pm Fair Monday and Tuesday [...] Decided to increase Arnold Marlow's wages from 5/- to 6/- per week.⁵⁸

The minute books are generally in good condition and cover several years at a time and are all hand written, many in the same hand and are not always easily legible. The Society was very keen on education and set up a Young People's Association. The aims of the association were:

The scheme must be self-governing, teach Courtesy, Culture, and widening and deepening bond of sympathy between those associated [...] We also recommend that 12 dozen books of Co-operative Songs be purchased for these meetings, and that the present Educational Committee form themselves into a special Committee to carry out the scheme.⁵⁹

The Co-operative Union Limited produced a booklet called "*Circles for Young People*"⁶⁰ which contained suggested rules for the association. There was also a Workers Educational Association which was unsectarian, non-party, and democratic. The Association was formed in August 1903, 'at a representative conference of Trade Unions, Co-operative Societies, and Educational Institutions'.⁶¹ Given the organisations that were involved in its conception it is hard to see how it could be non-party given the socialist agenda of some of the

⁵⁸ NRO. DCS 2, 19 May 1905.

⁵⁹ NRO. DCS 6/19, 16 August 1910.

⁶⁰ NRO. DCS 6/20 Co-operative Union Ltd., "*Circles for Young People*", (Manchester: Co-operative Printing Society Ltd., 1909), p. 1.

⁶¹ NRO. DCS 6/10 The Workers' Educational Association (Birmingham: Birmingham Printers, Ltd., November 1911), p. 1.

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participants. There was a need for a new political party to represent the interests and needs of the urban proletariat so three years earlier the Labour Party was born, with help from the Co-operative movement and others.

In the minutes for 22 August 1913, the committee met at six in the evening with a delegation from C.W.S Manchester present: 're proposals for a special advance or increased overdraft to enable us to make land purchases the primary purpose of which is to enlarge our area of Iron Ore bearing land'.⁶² They went on to discuss the purchase of the two thousand three hundred and forty-eight acre Harrington Estate of which five hundred acres was Iron Ore bearing. This was offered at forty-five thousand pounds. Mr Shillito from the C.W.S., 'said he saw no danger if we *'stick together'* and thinks the proposal good business'.⁶³ On the 2 October 1913, they offered forty-two thousand pounds for the Harrington Estate.⁶⁴ On the 24 October 1913, the committee resolved to decline the terms offered by the Temperance Institute to buy land in Havelock Street and Rushton Road. Considering that: 'apart from the price (15/- per yd) the conditions laid down were prohibitive'.⁶⁵ The Pall Mall Gazette said:

The Desborough Co-operative Society has shown itself a go-ahead body by purchasing the whole of the village of Harringsworth [misspelling of Harrington corrected in pencil on the original copy] in Northamptonshire, for £42,000 [...] we wish good luck in its enterprise. The inhabitants of Desborough are chiefly boot makers, and that they should have accumulated the capital necessary to make such a big purchase is a clear proof of their thrift and capacity. That co-operation should thus be applied to production by the working class themselves is

⁶² NRO. DCS 4, 22 August 1913.

⁶³ NRO. DCS 4, 22 August 1913.

⁶⁴ NRO. DCS 4, 2 October 1913.

⁶⁵ NRO. DCS 4, 24 October 1913.

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a welcome step in a direction which promises more for the future of industry than any other.⁶⁶

Clearly the society omitted to mention they had acquired a huge overdraft to secure the estate. On the 7 November 1913, it was in the minutes that the offer of forty-two thousand pounds for Harrington had been accepted, also that an overdraft of up to fifty-two thousand pounds would be needed to proceed. On 27 December 1913, an agreement to borrow sixty-thousand pounds from the C.W.S., was authorised and signed.

The records of the Desborough Co-operative Society are full of information of how the society was run. On 5 August 1914, it was resolved not to put prices up in the shops because of the war. Further insights reveal on 25 January 1895, and application was made by The Desborough Boot and Shoe Society for the Desborough Co-operative Society to build a factory (see figure 8). On 10 May the committee considered tenders for the building of the shoe factory in Victoria Street:

Co-operative Builders Kettering £770, C & F. Henson Kettering £760, J. Dawkins, Desborough £645. The latter being accepted requiring the works to be completed on or before the 31st day of August 1895, or a fine of £5 per week would be enforced.⁶⁷

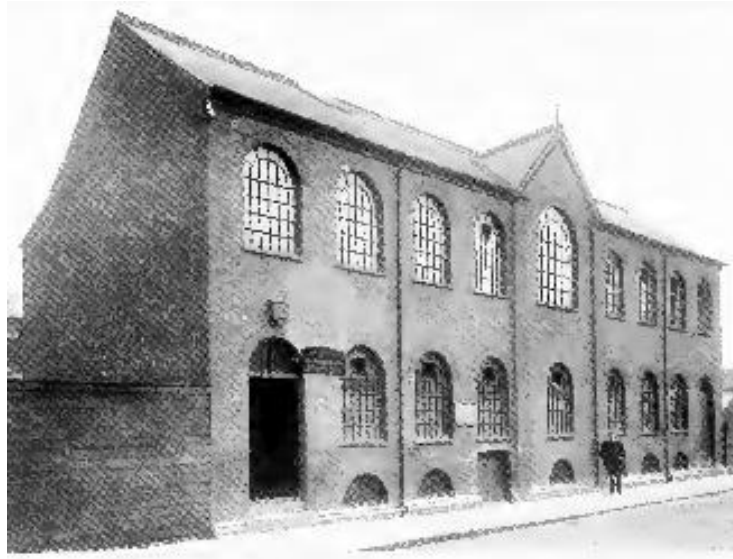
It seems amazing that the building could be completed in such a short time without the advantages of modern mechanical digging equipment. Nevertheless it was completed on time. The Society used J. Dawkins for much of its building work the name comes up many times in the Society's minutes, very often complaining about the finish or the late finishing of a job.

⁶⁶ NRO. DCS 4, *Pall Mall Gazette*, attached to minutes for 20 November 1913.

⁶⁷ NRO. DCS 1, 10 May 1895.

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Boot Society Factory, Victoria Street. (figure 8).⁶⁸

On 1 February 1895, it was resolved to make an offer for the Desborough Land and Building Society, formed in 1889, Desborough's first attempt at social housing and building society: 'with a view to take over their estate'.⁶⁹ On 27 February 1895, a special meeting was held to discuss the purchase. It was resolved to purchase the Land Society estate: 'for £2300, subject to a sum of £50 be allowed off for necessary repairs'.⁷⁰ Their land acquisition continued. In 1898 they purchased twelve cottages and Manor Farm, which is where the corset factory was to be sited, also in March 1898 they purchased the Waters estate for six thousand six hundred pounds. On 4 August 1911, the committee instructed the secretary to advance an offer: 'to £9000 this to be deemed the limit',⁷¹ for the Thorpe Underwood Estate. This sum was later accepted. The

⁶⁸ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 95.

⁶⁹ NRO. DCS 1, 1 February 1895.

⁷⁰ NRO. DCS 1, 27 February 1885.

⁷¹ NRO. DCS 3, 4 August 1911.

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society also made many small acquisitions of land particularly in the new town between High Street and the Railway Station. The minute books give a general feeling that they were a good employer and reasonably benevolent, although they could be tough and disapproving at times. They appear to have been oligarchical by nature and practised industrial paternalism which is said to 'disrupt the development of an independent character'⁷². With some of their original principles set aside they made excellent progress, with the accounts in 1912 showing:

Total Trade in Shops to be £ 32567.00. Dividend in General and Grocery to be 5/-, Butchery 3/-, Coal 5/9d. Shares £42346.00, Loans £7721, Small Savings Fund £4594. A reserve fund £1305. Distributive Trade Profits £2983. A total membership of 1500.⁷³ The population of Desborough on the census of 1911 was 4093⁷⁴ this means that at this time 36.65 per cent of the population were members of the society. This was set to increase over the years.

The Desborough Society were involved in many aspects of Desborough life, you may not have worked in one of their retail or industrial businesses, you may have worked in one of the factories of one of the many industrial concerns that moved into town, but you would have used their shops and one of their other many services such as milk or coal supplies or invested in the penny Bank.

⁷² John Stuart Mill, 'On Liberty', *John Stuart Mill: On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. by John Gray, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p.14.

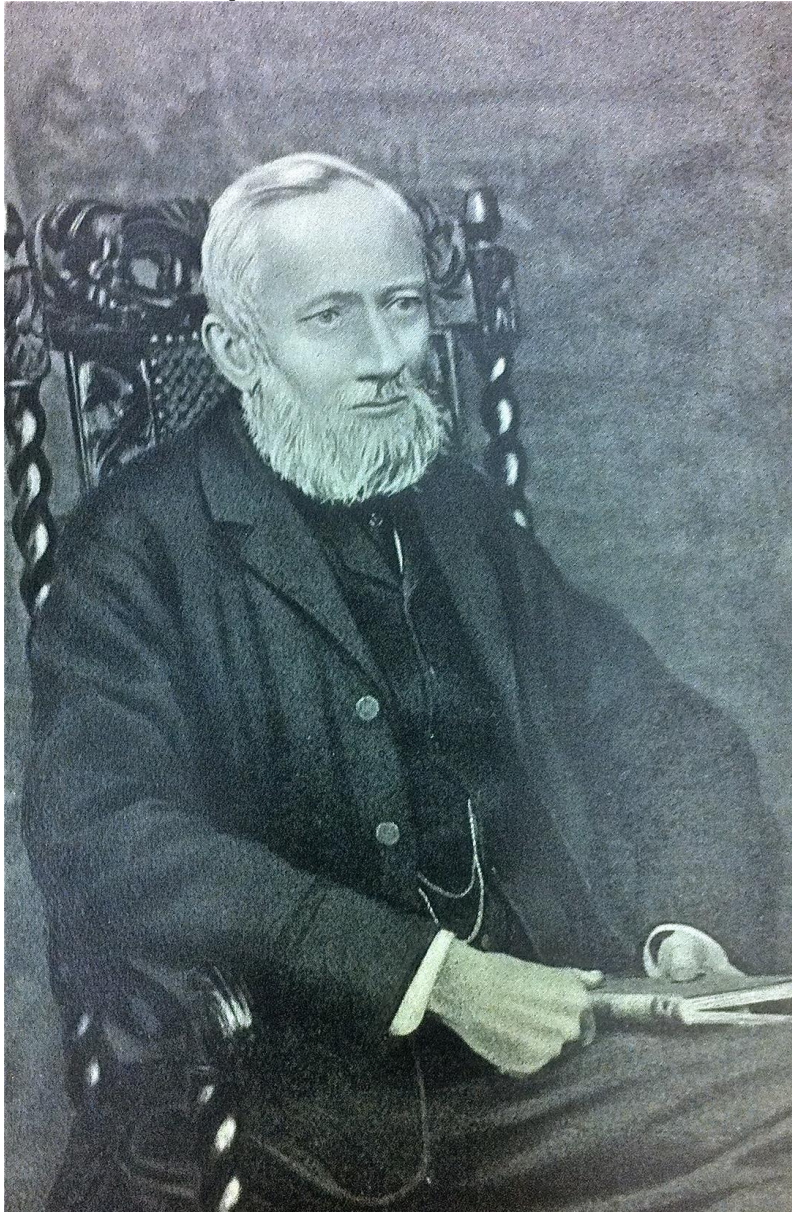
⁷³ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 102.

⁷⁴ *National Archives*. [on line].

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Industrial Expansion



Benjamin Riley III (Fig. 9)⁷⁵

In the early 1860s the plush silk trade, then owned by Benjamin Riley III (1831-1894) (see figure 9), who had taken over from his father, started to decline.

⁷⁵ B. Riley (Desborough) Ltd., B. Riley Jubilee Souvenir Fifty Years of Boot Making in Desborough (London & Northampton, Clarke & Sherwell Ltd., 1918) p. 1.

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This was, in part caused, by a shortage of silk due to silk worm disease, which, in response to the French sericulture's call for a cure, Louis Pasteur studied. Also a treaty with France in 1860 allowed French silks to come into Great Britain and Ireland duty free. British and Irish silk manufacturers were unable to compete with France, and combined with a change of taste in fashion, caused a perfect storm. Within a very short time the trade collapsed including Riley's and as they were the only industry in Desborough many people found themselves out of work. The B. Riley (Desborough) Ltd., *Jubilee Souvenir* of 1918 is housed in the Desborough Heritage Centre collection and documents the first fifty years of B. Riley's boot and shoe business (see figure 10). It is in pristine condition, the pages are not cut along the top and it appears to be a first sample edition. It is possible that it was never printed in quantity. In 1868 Mr Benjamin Riley: 'finally determined that his occupation, like Othello's was gone'.⁷⁶ This was an acknowledgement that the plush silk trade was in decline. The Riley *Jubilee Souvenir* continues:

But that, for the purposes of this narrative, was the beginning and not the end of things. Mr B. Riley had been a master weaver, first in Coventry, then in London and then in Desborough. But, with the declining taste of our forbears for fabrics of velvet and plush, the weaving industry fell on evil days [...].⁷⁷

At this point Riley decided that a different direction was needed for his company. He resolved to start a boys' boot and shoe manufacturing business, venturing some years later, into men's boots and shoes saying:

In those days Desborough awoke to a new order of things. The railway had recently been laid down, a sign of progress that brought with it suggestions of local development. To Mr Riley it was obvious that

⁷⁶ Riley, p. 5.

⁷⁷ Riley, p. 5.

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things did not turn up themselves. Mr Micawber expected them to. Mr Riley knew that things have to be turned by human activity. And so, with thoughts of his employees threatened by a reduction from their state of comparative comfort, he scrapped his idle looms and commenced the manufacture of boots and shoes [...].⁷⁸

There are contradictory accounts between the quote above, where Riley's appear to suggest that they opened the boot and shoe business to save their workers from unemployment and the Co-operative Society *Jubilee Souvenir*



Artists Impression of B. Riley (Desborough) Ltd., Shoe Factory. (figure 10) ⁷⁹

which says five hundred were thrown out of employment. It is also doubtful that a plush silk weaver would be able to turn his or her hand to boot and shoe manufacture without some extensive retraining in the techniques of that trade. Moore says that the silk trade completely ceased in 1868,⁸⁰ which is the same year Riley started the boot and shoe business (see figure 20). When Riley's opened for business he may well have encouraged workers from other boot and shoe factories to come to work for him, and it is probable that other manufacturers retrained the silk weavers in the art of boot and shoe making.

Riley was an enthusiastic Independent Christian and when he first came to the North Northamptonshire area he was drawn to Rothwell's Independent

⁷⁸ Riley, pp. 5-6.

⁷⁹ Riley, p. 9.

⁸⁰ Moore, p. 89.

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Church made famous by the Reverend Thomas Browning, who was jailed for offending against the 1665 Five Mile Act,⁸¹ and later the Reverend Richard Davis between 1689 and 1714.⁸² He only moved his attendance when Desborough got its own Congregational Church in 1860.⁸³ Moore says the church was opened on 'June 29, 1856'.⁸⁴ Moore's book gave a detailed account of the preacher of the opening service. This was a temporary church opened in Paddock Lane, in 1860 a new church was built in Union Street. Frederick T. Riley (1875-1944) (see figure 11), inherited the shoe firm upon the death of his father in 1894. He had been well trained to run the business by his father. In a lecture in 1942 F.T. Riley spoke of the effects of the difference between the silk and shoe trade, on his employees:

In the weaving trade the men had to keep their hands quite soft and smooth because of the fine silk threads and they used to go to work dressed in frock coats, silk hats and white shirts. So It was a great change and hardship for them to have to learn a new trade, which in those days was a particularly hard and dirty on the hands [...].⁸⁵

This again is contradictory because the suggestion of such fine attire hardly fits the image of the poorly paid worker. Although it is possible that they were given the garments in part payment for their work, it cannot be imagined that these workers, who were later to become part of the socialist ideals of

⁸¹ Moore, p. 75.

⁸² Michael Plant, *Banner of Truth* magazine. May 1988. Issue 296, p. 26.

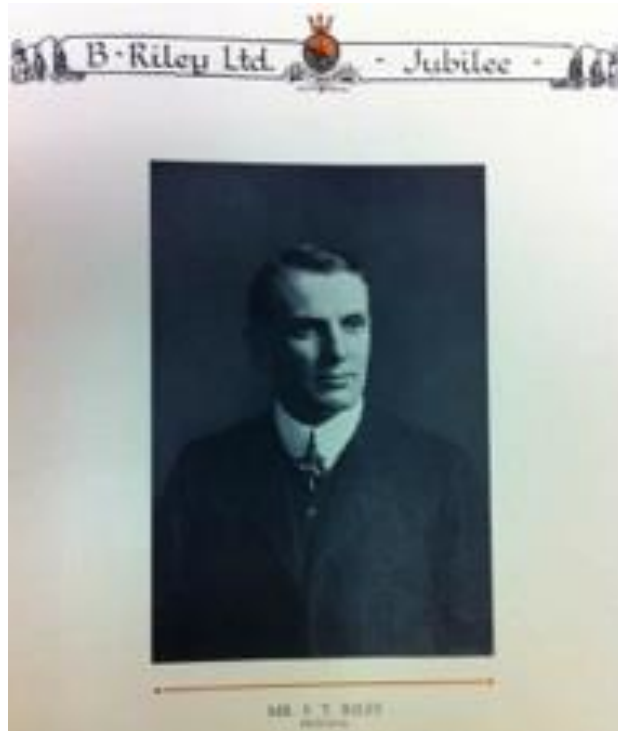
⁸³ Humfrey, Desborough Heritage Centre.

⁸⁴ Moore, p. 79.

⁸⁵ Humfrey, Desborough Heritage Centre archive.

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Mr F. T. Riley (figure 11).⁸⁶

co-operation, would willingly agree to use their wages for such a purpose. When Benjamin Riley III opened the boot and shoe works in his 'weaving factory No 1'⁸⁷ he was said to do so 'because he did not like to see men propping themselves up against the George corner'.⁸⁸ This is a reference to the George public house (see figure 12) on the corner of Station Road and High Street.

Shoe making had been associated with Northampton and the market towns to the North since the fifteenth-century. Mechanisation was introduced in 1838 by a young nineteen year old, Moses Philip Mansfield,⁸⁹ and the area was home to a growing boot and shoe industry, with some of the best known

⁸⁶ Riley, p. 7.

⁸⁷ Humfrey, Desborough Heritage Centre archive.

⁸⁸ Humfrey, Desborough Heritage Centre archive.

⁸⁹ *Northamptonshire History* [online]. Northamptonshire History, 2010. [accessed 12 July 2010].

<<http://www.northamptonshire-history.org.uk/?p+10>>

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⁹⁰ Doug Deans and Steve Richards, untitled, *Desborough Scrapbook*, March 2008, p. 28.

⁹¹ Joseph Cheaney and Sons. *Joseph Cheaney Heritage* [accessed 28 May 2011].

<<http://www.cheaney.co.uk/Page/heritage>>

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'Desborough Shoehands Strike Against Machinery'⁹² was the headline in the local paper of May 1906. On 8 May the lasters and finishers came out on strike over the installation of a Challenger pulling over system. Cheaney's were disappointed at the amount of work the lasters produced on the Challenger so they called in an operative from Northampton to '*make the pace*'. 'The lasters



Joseph Cheaney's Old Factory Workshop (figure 13).⁹³

objected to this and left work in a body'.⁹⁴ The Northampton operator was unable to continue using the Challenger so was asked to last up by hand. The finishers objected to this and joined the lasters on strike. When the operator and a representative from the manufacturers of the Challenger went for lunch they were attacked and manhandled by the strikers. They refused to go back into the factory and went to the railway station, made a complaint to the police and

⁹² Desborough Shoehands Strike Against Machinery, *Kettering Leader & Observer*, 11 May 1906.

⁹³ Cheaney.

⁹⁴ *Kettering Leader & Observer*, 11 May 1906.

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‘caught the 1.50pm train back to Northampton’.⁹⁵ Several other industries moved to the area assisted by the availability of skilled workers and the high unemployment in the area once Riley’s silk industry folded. The Co-operative Society was one of the prime movers in bringing new industries into the area.

As previously stated the London, Midland and Scottish Railway with the town station, came to Desborough in May 1857,⁹⁶ also brought much needed business and industry to the town. ‘With the advent of the railway line ironstone quarrying was commenced in the district’⁹⁷ some two years later. The Co-operative Society’s Jubilee Souvenir states that:

When the weaving trade left Desborough industrial conditions were very bad until the opening of the Midland Railway in the early sixties. Desborough then rose to a new era of activity, the boot and shoe industry being then established. And it is from this period that the town has made such great progress.⁹⁸

There is clearly a disagreement between Moore and Sanders et al, about the timing of the coming of the railway to Desborough as they have stated different decades. Moore’s account appears to be the accurate one as B. Radford says: ‘Desborough railway station was built by the Midland Railway in 1857 on its extension from Leicester to Bedford and Hitchin’.⁹⁹ The railway was the making of the town and the surrounding district, as it put Desborough ‘on the map’. The line did however cause some controversy. It went from Kettering to Market Harborough and quite a large station was built at Desborough, bypassing its

⁹⁵ *Kettering Leader & Observer*, 11 May 1906.

⁹⁶ Moore, p. 24.

⁹⁷ Moore, p. 42.

⁹⁸ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 16.

⁹⁹ B. Radford, ‘*Midland Line Memories: a Pictorial History of the Midland Railway Main Line Between London (St Pancras) and Derby*’. (London: Bloomsbury Books 1983).

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larger industrial sister town of Rothwell which was only two miles away. The railway also built a station at Rushton, a small but historic village, some three miles from Rothwell and equidistant from Desborough. This brought more business to Desborough as traders from Rothwell brought their goods to town for transportation further afield. 'Since the railway Desborough has overtaken Rothwell in population and became the bigger of the two in the industrial and population sense'.¹⁰⁰ The shoe trade was introduced into Desborough by Snow and Bennett, a Leicester based company, in about 1860, about eight years before the complete collapse of the silk weaving industry. The company made shoes by 'the system known as 'Cricks Patent' by means of sprigs [a small brad without a head] instead of the older method of hand sewing'.¹⁰¹ The credit for this system was given to a Thomas Crick, who was known in Leicester as 'the father of the industry',¹⁰² although there is some question over whether he actually invented the system. The shoe industry gave employment to both men and women with men cutting out the shoes and completing the making of them and women sewing them. 'Nearly all the work is done in the extensive factories that have been erected in the town'.¹⁰³ However, when the industry first came to the town and outlying villages, most of the work was done in people's homes and was run by agents for the companies. The worker was at the '*grace and favour*' of the company or agent. 'The new entrepreneurs (manufacturing

¹⁰⁰ J. R. Betts, *The Poultons of Desborough: Lords of the Manor and Recusants*. (Raunds: Randesbeck Books, 2006), p. 7.

¹⁰¹ Moore, p. 90.

¹⁰² "The City of Leicester: Footwear manufacture." *A History of the County of Leicester: volume 4: The City of Leicester (1958)*, ed. R. A. McKinley, pp. 314-326.

¹⁰³ Moore, p. 90.

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[capitalist] entrepreneurs) were bigger shoemakers in Northampton and some of the other towns of the county'.¹⁰⁴ The boot and shoe industry was considered a 'light consumer industry',¹⁰⁵ '[...] it was also the most extensive of these industries [...] in terms of master and men employed [...] and it was the industry in which the process of industrialisation was taken furthest'.¹⁰⁶ It is believed that these capitalist entrepreneurs and their agents continued with the established '*truck system*' of payment or at least still owned the retail outlets and were charging inflated prices for, what was often, adulterated goods. This added to the frustration felt by the townsfolk of Desborough who felt that with the collapse of the silk weaving industry and the small emerging boot and shoe industry some still using the '*truck system*' they were trapped, sowing the seeds of co-operation which became a *force major* in the district with its increased industrialisation.

Desborough is situated halfway between the then large centres of boot and shoe manufacture, Northampton and Leicester, with all the towns and villages between eventually coming to rely on the industry for their living. The towns of Northampton and North Northamptonshire were mainly making men's and boys' shoes and Leicester was better known for making women's shoes. One of the better known local manufacturers was B. Toone and Co. Ltd., who made 'Little

¹⁰⁴ Harald Rydberg, The Location of the English Shoe Industry. *Geografiska Annular, Series B, Human Geography*. 47:1. (1965) p. 45.

¹⁰⁵ Keith Barry Brooker. 'The Transformation of the Small Master Economy in the Boot and Shoe Industry 1887-1914: With Special Reference to Northampton'. (Unpublished Doctoral Thesis, University of Hull, 1986). ix.

¹⁰⁶ Brooker, ix.

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Duke The Aristocrat of Boys' Footwear'¹⁰⁷ (see figure 14) Benjamin Toone, Benjamin Toone Junior and John Wycliffe Black were partners in the business carried out at South Wigston, Leicestershire, and in Desborough. The *London Gazette* in 1901 shows the partnership dissolved with Black retaining the South Wigston business and the Toones' continuing business at Desborough.¹⁰⁸



Advertisement for 'Little Duke' Boys' Footwear (figure 14).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁷ Desborough Heritage Centre, from their collection of boot and shoe advertisements.

¹⁰⁸ Notices, *The London Gazette*, January 4, 1901, p. 116. [accessed 18 November 2011].

<<http://www.london-gazette.co.uk/issues/27263/pages/116/page.pdf>>

¹⁰⁹ Desborough Heritage Centre.

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Corsets and Boxes.

The Symington brothers were from Scotland and moved to Market Harborough in Leicestershire, some four miles north-west of Desborough. William arrived in 1827 and started a successful tea, coffee and grocery warehouse and shop. In 1830 James, his brother, followed and set himself up as a tailor, hatter and woollen draper in the shop next to his brother. William expanded and moved and the empty shop was taken over by Mrs Gold and her daughter Sarah who were stay-makers and seamstresses. Sarah and James married. In 1850 Sarah and three young assistants started to make corsets. Robert, the eldest son of Sarah and James, whilst on a business trip to the United States of America, found the sewing machine patented by Isaac Merrit Singer. Singer's machines had been used to manufacture corsetry since the 1840s. Robert was allowed to develop the machine to produce a reliable overlock stitch. The machine was brought back to Market Harborough and 'with some apprehension from staff the sewing of corsets by Symington's was partly mechanised'.¹¹⁰ The control of the corsetry business fell to Robert and his younger brother William Henry. The brothers expanded to make garments in their own name as well as for others. To help with this expansion, in 1879, Symington's built a new factory in Desborough in Factory Street, so-called because of the building of Symington's factory; it was in '*new town*' between the '*old town*' High Street and the Railway Station. By 1881 they were exporting

¹¹⁰ Leicestershire County Council, A Brief History of R & W. H. Symington and Company Ltd., Part One, 2004, updated 2004. Available from: <<http://www.leics.gov.uk>> [accessed 1 July 2011].

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garments to Australia, Africa, Canada, The United States and South America.

The Desborough factory closed in 1906 and became a boot and shoe factory for Bosworth Brothers.¹¹¹

In 1905 the Co-operative Wholesale Society moved its corset making business from Broughton, Greater Manchester, to Desborough in a large, brand new, purpose built factory on the outskirts of the town. They were attracted to the town because of the workforce's acknowledged corset manufacturing expertise. The factory was built for them by the Desborough Co-operative Society.

A few years sufficed to prove that at some time in the future larger premises would be required; and the attention of the Wholesale Committee was drawn to Desborough. The Northamptonshire township had a claim to be considered as a corset-making centre, and it made also a strong co-operative appeal. The distributive co-operative society at Desborough, besides enrolling the greater number of the inhabitants, had attained a unique position. With the help of a secured loan from the C.W.S. it had purchased [in 1898] a freehold estate of over 400 acres, carrying with it the local manor house. Under a large area of this land there proved to be a bed of iron ore, sufficiently valuable to recoup the society for the whole first cost. The Desborough co-operators decided to work this themselves; and, under the circumstances, to find employment for the girls and women of the village, they were ready to offer the C.W.S. special terms.¹¹²

When purchasing this land for the corset factory the Desborough Co-operative Society also purchased the manor house from the Clarke-Thornhill family which made them lord of the manor. The cost of the land was £16,000.¹¹³

¹¹¹ Jenny Ballinger, *Northamptonshire Extensive Urban Survey, Desborough*. (Northampton: Northamptonshire County Council, 2000), p. 10.

¹¹² Percy Redfern, *The story of the C.W.S.; the jubilee history of the Co-operative Wholesale Society Limited, 1863-1913*. (Manchester: C.W.S., 1913), p. 269.

¹¹³ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 76.

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They secured a loan from the CWS for twenty thousand pounds as noted in the minutes of the society of the 16 December 1898.¹¹⁴

The ownership of this estate carried with it the right of presenting the living of the parish church, but the Society, having no desire to dictate to the churchmen what sort of vicar they should have, relinquished the right of presentation to the bishop of the diocese.¹¹⁵

This right was not something that they relinquished when they purchased the village and manor of Harrington some two miles from Desborough. It was one of the largest factories built in the area (see figure 15). This reinforced the dominance of the Desborough Co-operative Society's industrial strength in the town. They were attracted to the town because of the workforce's acknowledged corset manufacturing expertise. There were other manufacturers of corsets in the town, H. (Harry) Burditt and Co. and Waterhouse, Reynolds, and Co. Harry Burditt is mentioned in The London Gazette of May 30th 1890 as dissolving a partnership between himself and a Thomas Seddon and John Seddon in a Box Manufacturing business in Kettering in the company name of T Seddon. Harry was Howard Burditt's father, and depending on whom you believe, in 1896 or 1907, Howard Burditt saved up fifty shillings and borrowed one hundred pounds from his family to start a box making company. The story is the same, just the dates that differ. According to an article in the *Northampton Chronicle and Echo* of the 20 September 2005 he started the company in 1896.¹¹⁶ The Rigid Containers website says it was in 1907 that Howard started

¹¹⁴ N.R.O. DCS 1, 16 December 1898.

¹¹⁵ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 12.

¹¹⁶ 'Built on Rigid Foundations'. *Northampton Chronicle and Echo*, September 2005 (para. 5 of 33).

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the company.¹¹⁷ There is some conjecture from newspaper articles fifty years later that it may have been 1906. Howard was born in 1882¹¹⁸ so unless he was fourteen when he started the company it may be assumed that the date given on the company's web site is correct. The business manufactured wicker and wooden boxes. These were used to pack goods to be dispatched on the railway. He started from two rented rooms in a former employer's factory in Paddock Lane. He reasoned that box making required the minimum of capital and with 'a boy and two girls, a hand cutter, a gas engine powered treadle scorer and a cart' he would make his fortune. By 1910 he employed about 12 people with a wage bill of £20 per week. He returned from World War One a hero, having been awarded the Military Cross, and was a Colonel.¹¹⁹ He persuaded some of his boot and shoe making customers to invest and Rigid Containers was born. On June 12, 2007, Philip Hollobone, the Member of Parliament for Kettering spoke of Colonel Howard Burditt and Rigid Containers and their long association and investment in Desborough, in a debate on the Packaging Manufacturing Industry..¹²⁰

¹¹⁷ Rigid Containers Ltd., Rigid Containers web site.

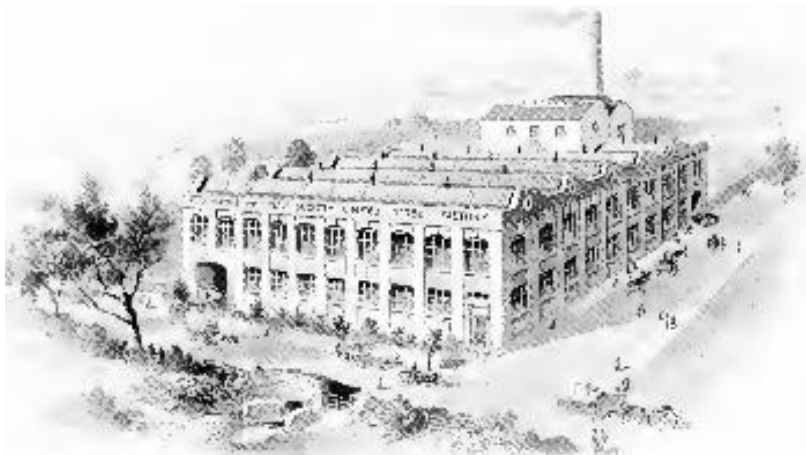
¹¹⁸ Birth Records <http://www.freebmd.org.uk/cgi/search.pl>.

¹¹⁹ Rigid Containers Ltd., Rigid Containers web site.

¹²⁰ They Work for You, *Hansard & Official Reports for the UK Parliament, Scottish Parliament and Northern Ireland Assembly*. [online] Packaging Manufacturing Industry Debate, [Mrs. Joan Humble in the Chair]. 12 June 2007 <<http://www.theyworkforyou.com>> [accessed 18 July 2011].

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Artists impression of the Corset Factory in Rothwell Road (figure 15).¹²¹

¹²¹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 97.

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Iron Ore and other Minerals.



QUARRY RAILWAY CUTTING.



PART OF IRON ORE QUARRY WORKS.

Quarry Railway Cuttings and parts of the Iron Ore Works (figure 16).¹²²

As the *Jubilee History* of the Co-operative Wholesale Society stated rich iron

ore deposits were found under the corset factory site. However, the whole of the

¹²² Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 89.

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parish of Desborough was known to be on a rich bed of ore and other minerals some two centuries earlier. It was found that a deposit of sand was on top of the iron ore deposits. 'This white sand [...] was sent away previous to 1712, into Staffordshire, for the purpose of glass making'.¹²³ Coincidentally a study of the local census shows that several families had relatives that were born in Staffordshire and then living in Desborough. The deposits were clearly visible on the slopes and the hill around the town.

The surface of the top of the hills is Boulder Clay, underlying this is a bed of Northamptonshire Sand or Oolite, composed of Sand, a rich Iron Ore, and a good Building Stone, and beneath this, extended to a depth of some 300ft., or more is a bed of Lias, or Blue Clay which makes good bricks.¹²⁴

Whilst the railway was being built in the 1850s rich beds of iron ore or ironstone (see figure 16), as it is known locally, were exposed in the deep cuttings that were required to run the line on the chosen route. When the railway was finished and open for transport some of the first traffic on the line was that of iron ore and other minerals. It was the railway that put the commercial value on these deposits. Iron Ore was first quarried from the land between the town and the railway station, which subsequently was the land that the '*new town*' was built on. This undertaking was pioneered by John Hickman who had opened quarries in Blisworth, just north of Northampton, in 1853.¹²⁵ Once quarrying had started millions of tons of iron ore were sent away to blast furnaces to extract the metal. It was because of the iron ore deposits in the North

¹²³ Moore, p. 91.

¹²⁴ Moore, p. 90.

¹²⁵ Moore, p. 91.

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Northamptonshire area that, in 1898, Stewart and Menzies Ltd., and Lloyd and Lloyd Ltd., well known and established metal producing companies merged to become Stewarts and Lloyds, and moved into Corby, some eight miles from Desborough, establishing a large steel town.

From 1905 the Desborough the Co-operative Society was quarrying the local iron ore and other deposits, which was a departure from the retailing activities usually associated with Co-operative Societies. The Society's *Jubilee Souvenir* says: 'After many dubitations and hesitations, the iron quarries were opened, and labour was employed directly by the Society to work the pits'.¹²⁶ The Society stopped its quarrying in 1920.¹²⁷ The Society thought that they would find it difficult to find buyers for the ore because:

It was thought that the great capitalistic firms would undoubtedly boycott us, as we were a Co-operative Society. These fears were found to be groundless, and the half-hearted ceased their questionings.¹²⁸

This quotation suggests that some in the Society, even after forty years as a successful Co-operative Society, had self-doubt about their status amongst the capitalist business institutions of the day. This indicates that the Co-operative movement may have felt inferior to big capitalist business. This was unfounded in Desborough's case: 'They found that they were accepted and placed their goods on the market and became reliable sellers of good-quality iron ore'.¹²⁹

¹²⁶ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 55.

¹²⁷ Sydney A. Leleux, *Ironstone Tramways of the Midlands (5) Desborough 'Co-op' Pits*. The Industrial Railway Record, September 1967 <<http://www.irssociety.co.uk/Archives>> [accessed 10 June 2011].

¹²⁸ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 55.

¹²⁹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 55.

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John N. Lester sole agent for the sale of ore for the Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society Limited (figure 17).¹³⁰

Our thanks are due to our efficient representative, Mr. John N. Lester (of Wolverhampton), (see figure 17) and the practical oversight of Mr. John Clarke, foreman of the works. Our output amounts to 2,000 tons per week. We employ 120 workmen, and two locomotives ply over two miles of railway.¹³¹

There were a number of quarrying companies operating in the area employing a large number of people. The quarries had a significant impact on the topography of the town and surrounding district. A number of quarries and associated tramways and transport networks are indicated on early Ordnance Survey Maps.¹³² In the 1880s bricks made of blue clay were made in the area (see figure 18), by the Society. A brick works site is shown to the west of the

¹³⁰ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 52.

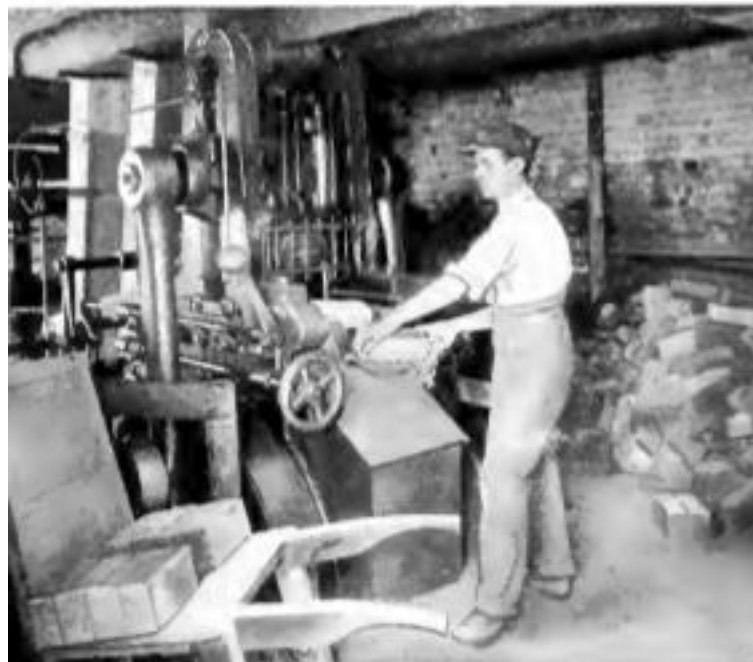
¹³¹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 55.

¹³² Ballinger, p. 9.

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town on the Ordnance Survey maps of 1887 and 1900.¹³³ A small quarry was adjacent to the site. However, by 1910 Moore comments: 'but as an industry brick making seems now to be at a standstill'.¹³⁴



Excavation of Clay and the Pressing of Bricks by workers of The Desborough Co-Operative Society (figure 18).¹³⁵

¹³³ Ballinger, p. 9.

¹³⁴ Moore, p. 91.

¹³⁵ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 92.

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POPULATION GROWTH.

Population growth did come to the county, eventually, and Desborough saw an increase in population, as industrialisation took over from the agrarian regime that had existed for centuries.

Although Northamptonshire was missed by the main features of the Industrial Revolution it was profoundly affected by one important force which did much to change traditional England at the time; the growth of population from about 1760.¹³⁶

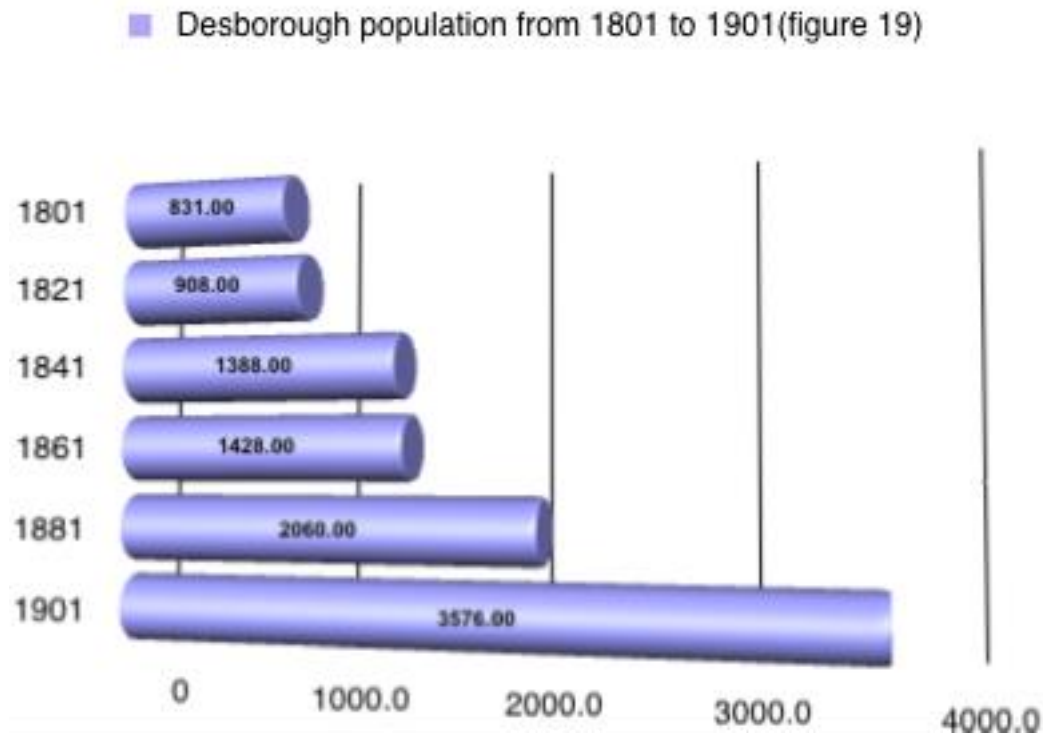
The population growth of both the county and the town is unknown between 1760 and 1800. However, the first census of 1801 begins to give us some definite information on how the population of the area grew. Between 1801 and 1851, a period of very slow economic growth in the area, the county's population grew by sixty-one percent (from 132,000 to 212,000), between 1851 and 1901 it grew an additional fifty-eight percent to 336,000, at a time that the shoe trade underwent a phenomenal expansion, giving a total population increase of about one hundred and fifty-four percent. Desborough's own population growth was somewhat more modest in terms of numbers, but as a percentage was far greater than the rest of the county. Below is a chart (see figure 19) that shows the increase in population in Desborough from 1801 to 1901.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Greenall. p. 93

¹³⁷ Information on census from 1841 to 1901 from the *National Archives* <<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/records>> [accessed 9 October 2010]. Desborough census 1801 to 1841 information from Moore, p.34.

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Desborough's population in the same one hundred years grew by three hundred and thirty percent. This increase raised the spectre of increased poverty and increased poor rates, and the relationship of employment to population became crucially important. This was starting to cause problems for Desborians because until about 1793 the growth of rural industry kept pace with the increase in population. However, when the population started to outstrip the industrial growth the cost of maintaining the poor increased. There were several years of crisis, caused by harvest failures, severe winters and outbreaks of disease such as smallpox and influenza, which caused much deprivation amongst the poor. In the 1790s the situation in the town and the county took a radical turn for the worse with a 'prolonged depression',¹³⁸ which prevailed until 1860s, giving

¹³⁸ Greenall, p. 116.

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further evidence to the lack of industrialisation in the region.

With competition from the mechanised textile industries of the North many other parts of England fell into decline. Northamptonshire, and in particular North Northamptonshire's textile industry collapsed almost overnight. This coincided with national hardship caused by the Napoleonic wars and their aftermath, causing the poor grave problems as the staple food was bread. The price of wheat doubled due to poor or failed harvests and war restricting imports thus making the cost of bread prohibitive. Desborough, at this time, 'was full of half-starved handloom weavers and woolcombers'¹³⁹ with the suffering lasting for two generations. As previously stated, from about 1820 silk-weaving and lace-making was introduced which offered just enough jobs to employ all the former wool weavers and their families. Employment prospects started to improve in Desborough. *The Post Office Directory* for Desborough for 1847 records a population of 1388 in 1841 (from the census). It also records one church and three chapels, and the parish was some two thousand acres. It names three gentry, Mr William Dorkins, Samuel Thompson, Esq., and Rev. Samuel Walker, and Mrs Anderson is lady of the manor. The entry lists twenty-five traders; one was silk weaver, George Crich.¹⁴⁰ It is known that Riley's silk manufacturing was firmly established in Desborough in 1832. Benjamin Riley II is not mentioned in the directory. By 1854 Benjamin Riley II was in the *Post Office Directory*, shown as a silk manufacturer, Mrs Anderson was lady of the

¹³⁹ Greenall, p. 94.

¹⁴⁰ W. Kelly & Co., *Post Office directory of Berkshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, with Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Huntingdonshire*. (London: Kelly & Co., 1847).

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manor and there were thirty-four trader entries. The population was, according to the 1851 census 1350,¹⁴¹ a decrease of thirty-eight over 1841. The 1869 *Post Office Directory* shows a population of 1428 an increase of seventy-eight, but is now showing Benjamin Riley as gentry along with five others and showing that whilst Mrs Anderson was considered gentry she was no longer lady of the manor. The title of lord of the manor had gone to W.G. Clarke-Thornhill, Esq, who also had extensive interests in Rushton. The parish acreage had increased to 2380. There were now fifty traders and the Co-operative store was included along with Benjamin Riley III who, by then, was shown as a boot and shoe manufacturer. There were a further two boot and shoe manufacturers listed including Snow and Bennett. The 1898 *Kelly's Directory* says: 'The manufacture of boots, shoes, stays and the raising of iron ore gives employment to a great many hands'.¹⁴² By 1914 the *Kelly's Directory of Northamptonshire* was showing population of 4092 in the 1911 census, nearly tripling that of 1841. The principal land owner and lord of the manor was the Desborough Co-operative Society Limited. The Local Government Act (1898) (56 and 57 Vict. C. 74) meant Desborough was now run as an Urban District Council. Frederick T. Riley was Vice-Chairman of the Council along with several prominent members of the Desborough Co-operative Society. There were 122 traders listed which included eight boot and shoe manufacturers, two banks, two corset manufacturers, one of which was the Co-operative Wholesale Society Ltd., the

¹⁴¹ W. Kelly & Co., *Post Office directory of Berkshire, Northamptonshire, Oxfordshire, with Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Huntingdonshire*. (London: Kelly & Co., 1854).

¹⁴² W. Kelly & Co., *Kelly's Directory of Northamptonshire 1898, Desborough*. (London: Kelly & Co., 1898).

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Co-operative Society shows three businesses, there was The Desborough Gas Company Ltd., and the Desborough Urban District Council Water Works.¹⁴³ The large increase in population over the fifty years shows how the town and its industry had grown. Much of this growth was due to The Desborough Co-operative Society which, apart from increasing its own holdings and business in the town also built factories for the underwear and boot and shoe departments of the Co-operative Wholesale Society, as well as attracting many other companies to move to the area including the famous R. & W.H. Symington and Company Ltd.



Riley's Lasting Room (Figure 20)¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ W. Kelly & Co., *Kelly's Directory of Northamptonshire 1914, Desborough*. (London: Kelly & Co., 1914).

¹⁴⁴ Riley, p. 11.

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CONCLUSION.

This dissertation has looked at business and industry and its effect on the social life of the small market town of Desborough. It has taken a detailed look at how industry came to the area and some of the people responsible for its development. Industry was late coming to Desborough, the area industrialised much later than some other parts of Britain. The Dissertation has shown that: 'less happened, less dramatically',¹⁴⁵ and that the Industrial Revolution was dependent on two things, how we specify 'Industrial Revolution and how we attempt to measure it'.¹⁴⁶ Up until the 1820s agriculture was the way of life and was the main employer of labour, as confirmed by the Militia List. It has shown that some of the produce grown in the area, wool, flax and woad, were the main ingredients for the small emerging industry in Desborough. It gave employment when the agrarian revolution began to mechanise and less men were needed on the land. Early industrialisation was capitalistic in nature with the rich landed gentry and bourgeoisie, owning the wealth and the means of production. The poor were used as a means to an end. The Industrial Revolution that got under way in other towns of Britain passed Desborough by, therefore failing to bring wealth and prosperity to the region. The emerging wool and linen trades were not run by local entrepreneurs but by merchants, traders and representatives from further afield, Unlike the home grown entrepreneurs of Birmingham, however, they had one thing in common with Desborough businessmen they

¹⁴⁵ Cannadine in Hudson, p. 1.

¹⁴⁶ Hudson, p. 1.

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were very often nonconformist church members. The capitalist enterprises took the profit and the wealth out of Desborough, paying workers as little as they could get away with and getting them into debt with the '*truck system*' of payment, thus tying the workers to those who ran the shops and the industry. The whole of Northamptonshire was pre-industrial in the early nineteenth-century. The dissertation has challenged Hobsbawm's assertions about the 'take-off'¹⁴⁷ of the Industrial Revolution, and argued that less did happen, less quickly. It has also challenged the socialist-communist belief that the Industrial Revolution was bad for the working-class as it has shown that pay and conditions improved in the 'decade[s] from the 1830s than any decade before 1820'.¹⁴⁸ Qualitative life did improve with new laws concerning the employment of women and children, hours of work and lower mortality rates. Although tough, life was better in the mid to latter part of the nineteenth-century than it had been before.

Some wool was retained in Desborough and a small cottage industry emerged making serges, tammies and shaloon. However, by 1840 woollen, weaving and linen industries had died out. Benjamin Riley came from Coventry in about 1820 and started the silk weaving industry which saved many a family from starvation, until its demise in the 1860s. The accounts of the silk industries' collapse has thrown up a few discrepancies between accounts of what happened. The dissertation has investigated these anomalies. Riley's account, in their *Jubilee Souvenir*, suggests that the shoe industry was set up to keep the

¹⁴⁷ Hobsbawm, p. 28.

¹⁴⁸ Williamson, in Majewski, (para.4 of 27).

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silk weavers in employment. The dissertation has pointed out that there would need to be retraining of weavers. The account in the Co-operative Societies *Jubilee Souvenir* says: '500 plush weavers were said to have been thrown out of employment in Desborough',¹⁴⁹ casts doubt on Riley's version.

The dissertation has discussed the growth in population of both Northamptonshire and Desborough and has shown that during the nineteenth-century Desborough's population grew by three hundred and thirty percent. Most of the increase was achieved in the latter part of the century after the railway and the shoe and corset industries and Co-operative Society became established in the town. It has shown that the directories of the time showed an increase in the wealthy as well as an increase in businesses becoming established in Desborough. However, the business with the greatest impact on the town was the formation of the Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society Ltd. It started from humble origins in the Rochdale co-operative model, it grew to become the largest, owner of land, businesses, industrialists and employer in the area. The dissertation has shown that the Society suspended some of its co-operators values to get to this position. It also demonstrated that co-operators '*stick together*'¹⁵⁰ and made some excellent business decisions. They purchased several estates, farms and land, set up many shops, milk depot, coal depot, a bank, took over several businesses including the local Building Society and Land Company and their holdings. This increased their holdings of property which added to the housing stock they

¹⁴⁹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰ NRO. DCS 4.

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already owned and were either sold or rented out. They sold or rented land to individuals for small holdings and allotments, and were acknowledged as experts in land reform, Mr Jesse Marlow appeared before a select committee to give advice on the subject. They assisted other co-operators by building factories in the town which turned into profitable businesses which gave employment to Desborians and others in the area. The iron ore taken from the land they purchased gave a healthy increase to their profitability. They ran a very successful and profitable enterprise. Co-operation also attracted other industries and businesses into the town, leading to the completion of the Industrialisation of the area. In the time period covered by this dissertation, Desborough and the surrounding parts of North Northamptonshire, have experienced times of feast and famine. There have been disasters, for example crop failure, bad winters and disease, such as smallpox and influenza epidemics. There has been time of plenty with much work and times of hardship when businesses failed, as we have seen not always the fault of the owners, however, in the latter part of the period discussed things did improve. The railway brought business to the town it directly led to the setting up of the box works to feed the requirement for packaging to put items on the train, as well as supply boxes for shoes, corsets and other items made in the area. Hauliers and carriers found business bringing goods from the outlying areas to the station at Desborough for onward shipping to far flung parts of the Empire. The boot and shoe trade flourished. Corset manufacturers were attracted to the area by the skills of the machinists and ladies fancy underwear manufacture was very

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successful. Iron ore was scraped from the land and when it was gone so did the business. The brick and tile manufacture went the same way.

This dissertation has shown that the town and its hinterland were inextricably linked from the centuries of agriculture through to the industrialisation of the area, with each component part dependent on the other for its inspiration and livelihood. Capitalists and the bourgeoisie owned the land. Capitalist entrepreneurs came into the area set up businesses shackled the population to the *'truck'*. Some, like Benjamin Riley, were against the practice and lent support to the new co-operative way that emerged, in the mid 1800s, which was brought to the town by the co-operative missionary, John Jarman. Twenty-eight men put one pound each into a fund to start the Desborough Co-operative Society, which turned into one of the most profitable, and in many ways, capitalistic, diverse companies in the country. The Desborough Co-operative Society started out with the philosophy of the Rochdale Pioneers. They supported other Co-operatives as indeed they were supported themselves, the C.W.S., lending them money to become a land owner with all the manorial and other rights that came with those acquisitions. The co-operative movement has, at times, acted as a cartel and excluded others from business. Desborough Industrial and Provident Co-operative Society Ltd., remained in business until the mid 2000s when it was purchased by the Midland Co-operative group who have bought all the local independent co-operative societies of Northamptonshire. At the height of their success the Desborough Society wielded much power in the way the town was administered and held the power of veto over much of the development within the town and its environs.

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Jubilee Souvenir of Desborough Co-operative Society, Progress¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ Sanders, Marlow and Marlow, p. 3.

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